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TAGS: [KPAO](#) [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [OIIP](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: MEDIA PLAY: Armitage to Attend Tokyo Conference  
on Sri Lanka Reconstruction

11. Summary: On 5/23 Washington announced that Deputy  
Secretary Armitage would attend the Tokyo Conference on

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reconstruction for Sri Lanka. Post issued a similar press  
release to local media on 5/24. Independent and  
government-owned television stations heralded Armitage's  
decision in all languages. English and vernacular coverage  
of the announcement was heavily covered in Sri Lankan  
weekend newspapers. One English opposition paper commented  
on US and international involvement in Tokyo (5/25),  
"Obviously if the world community did not believe that  
there was a genuine possibility of working out a durable  
peace here, they would not be devoting their time, energy  
and money in backing the effort." End summary.

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12. Television.  
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Independent and government-owned television stations  
heralded Armitage's decision to attend the Tokyo Conference  
in English, Sinhala and Tamil newscasts (5/24).

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13. Headlines.  
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English and vernacular coverage of Armitage's announcement  
was heavy in Sri Lankan weekend newspapers. Opposition  
English daily ISLAND scooped on 5/24 with, "US will attend  
Tokyo conference." Government-owned Sinhala daily DINAMINA,  
headlined (5/25), "'Japan Aid Conference to be held as  
scheduled' - American State Department." Government-owned  
Sinhala weekly SILUMINA reported (5/25), "'Go ahead with  
Japan Aid Conference'-says America," while state-owned  
Tamil weekly, THINAKARAN VAARAMANJARI ran a stronger  
headline (5/25), "'Irreparable loss to Sri Lanka if the  
Tokyo Conference does not take place'- Richard Armitage."

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14. Editorial Comment.  
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On 5/25, under the headline, "The Tigers and Tokyo,"  
opposition English weekly ISLAND SUNDAY commented on U.S.  
and international involvement in Tokyo: "Obviously if the  
world community did not believe that there was a genuine  
possibility of working out a durable peace here, they would  
not be devoting their time, energy and money in backing the  
effort." The editor also observed, "If the Tigers really  
feel for their people, their duty lies in maximizing  
foreign assistance that can be raised for reconstructing  
and repairing the war devastation in both the North and the  
East." Excerpts:

"Whether the news from Washington and Tokyo that the major  
donor conference to be hosted in mid-June by the Japanese  
government will be held regardless of LTTE participation  
will nudge the Tigers to abandon their hard line and attend  
the meeting remains to be seen. There is no doubt that the  
absence of the LTTE from this meeting, showcased to both  
Sri Lanka and the world as an event where the pledging of  
some serious money is assured, will rob the event of some  
of its glamour. But it is not going to scuttle it  
altogether as the LTTE, now playing a dangerous game of  
brinkmanship, seems to expect. This became unmistakably  
clear on Friday.

"The Tigers understand international pressure very well.  
That, together with the war weariness of the people they  
claim to represent, is what encouraged them in the first  
place to sign the cease-fire agreement and sit at the  
negotiating table with Colombo's representatives.

"The U.S. State Department said on Friday that Deputy  
Secretary Armitage was attending the Tokyo meeting. In

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language that was clearly unambiguous, the State  
Department's spokesman repeated the dates - June 9 and 10 -  
and the venue adding that Armitage looked forward to  
discussing reconstruction and rehabilitation assistance to  
Sri Lanka at the conference. The high ranking official was  
quoted saying that this event was important for the

international community, enabling it to "demonstrate its solid support for the peace process and its full commitment to contribute to the reconstruction and development of all regions of the country, including the North and East, which have been devastated by nearly 20 years of conflict."

"Washington intends to back up its statement with letters to some 60 countries about the importance of the Tokyo meeting and the need for their attendance and support. Obviously if the world community did not believe that there was a genuine possibility of working out a durable peace here, they would not be devoting their time, energy and money in backing the effort. That is why the LTTE, seeking to extract the last ounce of possible advantage for itself, has adopted its present strategy. Given the ease with which it extracted other concessions like having Colombo lift its proscription on the Tigers and the softening of their stance by some countries where the LTTE is outlawed, Prabhakaran and Balasingham may well have believed that there is more to get. The run-up to Tokyo was obviously the best time to grab what they can and that's the way the game is now being played. The interim administration for the northeast dominated by themselves is clearly the immediate objective.

"The people of Sri Lanka have already enjoyed some benefits of peace in the fifteen months since the gun went silent. But the economic dividends have been slow in coming. Colombo has built up massive expectations that this would change post-Tokyo and the signals from abroad tended to support that view. Apart from the U.S. position that the Tokyo meeting must be held as scheduled, "notwithstanding the LTTE's stated position not to participate," the arrest in Thailand of some Tiger arms smugglers and the whip cracking by the Thai prime minister that followed must also send a message to the Tiger hierarchy that they are now sailing very close to the wind.

"Now that it's clear that the Tokyo meeting will be held, with or without the LTTE, they must also remember that pledges can also get diverted for flood relief in the south if they are absent from that forum when how the funds pledged will be utilized. Undoubtedly, flood relief too is badly needed but rebuilding the infrastructure in the northeast will still command greater donor focus if the case is properly presented. If the Tigers really feel for their people, their duty lies in maximizing foreign assistance that can be raised for reconstructing and repairing the war devastation in both the North and the East. Losing out there by default will be criminal folly."

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